

# Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta

Phase 1 – 2008

Discussion  
Guide



**we** engage  
engager

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## Message from the Minister of Education

Our students are the future of a vibrant and prosperous Alberta in the 21st century. If Alberta is to fulfill its potential as a province, we must ensure each young person reaches his or her potential.

We must equip all of our students with the skills, attributes and knowledge needed to explore the wide variety of opportunities available when they complete high school. Meeting that objective begins with accepting that not all young people begin their education with the same physical, intellectual, social, health and other assets. Our education system must be responsive to young Albertans' individual needs and flexible enough to meet them.

Alberta schools currently identify some 67,000 students with special education needs. These students' characteristics — physical, developmental or learning disabilities, the gifted and talented — require their schools to tailor their programming. While every student is unique and will need some individualized attention, Alberta recognizes that many students will need additional support services and intervention in order to succeed.

As the population of students with special education needs changes, we are challenged to respond to the requirements of students, families, schools and school authorities. These stakeholders have told us that we need to look comprehensively at special education in Alberta schools to ensure that each student reaches his or her potential.

Such a comprehensive examination of special education necessitates answering questions about how we educate students with special education needs:

- What does success for all students mean?
- What do we need to do in order to ensure success?
- What might be impeding the results we want for all students?

These questions help us see what we can do better by looking at special education in new ways and re-evaluating our current approach to special education policy, accountability and funding.

Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta is a major project to create a new framework that will ensure students with special education needs get the supports they need to be successful. The project is comprehensive and far-reaching, and will consider the needs of students in all types of schools: public, separate, francophone, charter and private. We are looking at other provinces and countries to find out what is working for them in special education. We are talking to teachers, administrators, parents and guardians, service providers, and students themselves to find out what they need.

Most important of all, we need to know what you think.



**Dave Hancock, QC**

Minister, Alberta Education





## Purpose of this Discussion Guide

If we accept the premise that all students deserve an education that will help them to reach their potential, then we must address the complexity of what that education might look like for students with special education needs. Education affects us all because our future depends on the success of the students who are in schools today. They will become the citizens of tomorrow, raising families, contributing to our communities, voting and holding jobs.

Whether you have a child with physical, behavioural, communicational, intellectual, and developmental or learning disabilities, a child who is extremely gifted, or no children at all, the kind of Alberta we want begins in our schools and must be supported by sound policy foundations. For this reason, we want to hear what you think about special education in our province.

The purpose of this guide is to provide some background on the Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta project. Phase 1 of the project, we want your thoughts about what an education community that truly meets the needs of each student ought to look like. We want to create a fresh vision for providing those additional support services and interventions. We want the principles that should guide education policy decisions to ensure that each young person has the opportunity for success. Phase 2 will take place in February and March 2009 and will see us seeking your input on options for special education policy, accountability and funding. The Phase 2 consultation will invite Albertans to participate through community meetings (to be once again held across Alberta) and/or through a survey on-line or in print form. The third and final phase of the consultation takes place at a Minister's Forum scheduled for June 8-9, 2009 in Edmonton. More information about Phase 2 of the consultation and the Minister's Forum will be available in the coming weeks.

## Special Education in Alberta – What do we need to look at?

Alberta Education has identified a number of themes related to special education. These themes emerge from outside Alberta Education – through research, letters, discussions, and special education symposia and conferences – and from Alberta Education's own reviews. Recent efforts have included:

- Shaping the Future for Students with Special Needs: A Review of Special Education in Alberta (2000)
- Every Child Learns. Every Child Succeeds – The Report of the Alberta Commission on Learning (2003)
- Special Education Programming Standards Reviews
- Severe Disabilities Profile Funding Review

**Listed below are some of the concerns that have come forward. They are grouped into three broad categories - policy, accountability and funding.**

### 1. Policy

- Consistency in policies, requirements and reporting structures for special education.
- Clarification of terms (special needs, special education, inclusion, integration and disabilities) and a clear definition of what we mean by special education needs.
- Appropriateness of labels and categories for identifying students.
- Appropriateness of the outcomes of the Alberta Programs of Study for students with special education needs.
- Differing interpretations of what is meant by an inclusive model of schooling.
- Inconsistency within the delivery of special education programming across the province.



## 2. Accountability

- The effect on programming of rigorous requirements for identification documents.
- Appropriateness for special education students of our overall markers of success.
- Challenges of interagency collaboration to deliver services.

## 3. Funding

- Adequacy of special education funding.
- Supports for special education programming.
- Availability of resources across the province.
- Appropriate distribution of funding.

## We Want to Hear from You!

What do you think is important to include in a vision for special education in Alberta and a framework for new special education policy? Your input is important to us! Please answer the following questions and return your completed questionnaire by **December 31, 2008**.

A third party will review all the responses and group them so we can see how some ideas fit together and others stand apart. All questionnaire data will be managed in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*.

In addition, you may want to participate in one of the Phase 1 Community Consultation Sessions (see list below). French facilitators will be available at the following session: Grande Prairie, St. Paul, Edmonton and Calgary. Please R.S.V.P. by visiting [www.settingthedirection.alberta.ca](http://www.settingthedirection.alberta.ca) or by calling 780-643-0834.

## Phase I Consultation Schedule November / December 2008

| Date        | Community/<br>Region | Venue  | Address                  | Times                                |
|-------------|----------------------|--|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| November 12 | Red Deer             | Red Deer Lodge   | 4311 - 49 Avenue         | 1:30 to 4:30 pm<br>& 6:30 to 9:30 pm |
| November 18 | Fort McMurray        | Quality Inn &<br>Conference Centre                       | 424 Gregoire Drive       | 1:30 to 4:30 pm                      |
| November 25 | Hinton               | Hinton Friendship<br>Centre                              | 965 Switzer Drive        | 1:30 to 4:30 pm                      |
| November 26 | Edmonton             | Ramada Hotel<br>and Conference<br>Centre                 | 11834 Kingsway Avenue    | 1:30 to 4:30 pm<br>& 6:30 to 9:30 pm |
| December 2  | High Level           | Executive House<br>Suites Hotel and<br>Conference Centre | 9815 - 101 Street        | 1:30 to 4:30 pm                      |
| December 3  | St. Paul             | St. Paul Regional<br>High School                         | 4701 - 47 Street         | 1:30 to 4:30 pm                      |
| December 4  | Grande Prairie       | Holiday Inn Hotel<br>and Suites                          | 9816 - 107 Street        | 1:30 to 4:30 pm                      |
| December 8  | Lethbridge           | Exhibition Park  | 3401 Parkside Drive S.   | 1:30 to 4:30 pm                      |
| December 11 | Calgary              | Radisson Hotel   | 2120 16th Avenue N.E.    | 1:30 to 4:30 pm<br>& 6:30 to 9:30 pm |
| December 12 | Medicine Hat         | Medicine Hat<br>Lodge                                    | 1051 Ross Glen Drive S.E | 1:30 to 4:30 pm                      |



There are three options for participating in the consultation process:

1. Go to [www.settingthedirection.alberta.ca](http://www.settingthedirection.alberta.ca) and complete the questionnaire online.
2. Print a copy of the questionnaire below, fill it in, and send it to:

Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta  
c/o Special Programs Branch, Alberta Education  
10044-108 Street  
Edmonton, AB T5J 5E6

Fax: 780 422-2039

3. Attend a community consultation (list on previous page). Don't forget to R.S.V.P.

## Big Picture

1. Do you think that we have an effective approach to special education in Alberta?

☐ Yes ☐ No

2. How important do you think the following factors are in creating a successful framework for a new special education policy?

Please check your responses.

|   | Strongly Disagree        | Disagree                 | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree                    | Strongly Agree           |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Effective teaching  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Comprehensive programming for students                              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Prompt and accurate assessment of students                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Provision of support services                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Categorizing of students using current coding criteria              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Comprehensive data collection and data sharing in special education | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Classroom environment   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Funding distribution  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Schools that are welcoming and practise inclusion                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Meaningful monitoring of success in classrooms                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Other factors (please specify)

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3. What do you think is the greatest challenge to making changes or setting a new direction for special education in Alberta?

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## Vision

A vision is a picture of an ideal future that sets direction, inspires creativity and provides opportunities for all students. It should describe how the future will be different than today.

4. What do students with special education needs require to achieve educational success?

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5. What should we – as a province – be striving to achieve through special education?

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6. Alberta Education's Mission states that: "The Ministry of Education, through its leadership, partnerships and work with the public – including stakeholders – inspires, motivates and provides the necessary tools and opportunities for every child to attain the knowledge, skills and attributes required for lifelong learning, self-sufficiency, work and citizenship." Do you believe that this mission serves students with special education needs?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

☐ Not sufficiently (please explain below)

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## Guiding Principles

Guiding principles are deeply held beliefs that guide goal setting and action. While goals change over time, guiding principles stay the same.

7. What words come to mind when you think about the ideal special education system for Alberta?

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8. What fundamental ideas need to guide special education in Alberta?

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9. Do you have any other comments or suggestions?

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## To help us understand and categorize your responses, please answer the following questions.

10. Where do you live? Please check one.

- ☐ City  
☐ Town or village  
☐ Municipal district or county  
☐ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

11. Please provide the first three characters of your postal code (example T5K).

12. Are you answering this questionnaire as a:

- ☐ Parent  
☐ Parent of student with special education needs  
☐ Student  
☐ Teacher or school administrator  
☐ Representative of a school authority  
☐ Representative of government  
☐ Representative of a service provider  
☐ Group who has had a discussion (\_\_\_\_ people participated in discussing this submission and they represent\_\_\_\_\_)  
☐ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_



## THANK YOU for your input!

Your ideas will be used to help design a new special education framework in Alberta.

Check the website at [www.settingthedirection.alberta.ca](http://www.settingthedirection.alberta.ca) for updates on the process and release of the final report, expected in 2010.

## Steering Committee

### Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta

**Naresh Bhardwaj (Chair)** – MLA, Edmonton-Ellerslie

**Mike Bruised Head** – Principal, Tatsikiisaapo’p Middle School, Kainai Board of Education

**Margaret Clarke** – Pediatrician, Calgary Health Authority

**Joanne Cuthbertson** – Chancellor, University of Calgary

**Dena Davis** – Project Coordinator and Assistant Principal, The Way In

**Shauna Gervais** – Community Member

**Ron Gilbertson** – President and CEO, Edmonton Economic Development Corporation

**Carole Anne Hapchyn** – Child Psychiatrist, Capital Health Authority

**Sue Lynch** – Adjunct Professor, Director Child Study Centre, University of Alberta

**Bill McKeown** – Vice-President, Canadian National Institute for the Blind

**Brian Malloy** – Regional Director of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry and Suburban & Area Clinics, Capital Health’s Regional Mental Health Program

**Anne Price** – CEO, Calgary Learning Centre

**Iris Saunders** – Executive Director, Employabilities

**Nancy Spencer-Poitras** – Superintendent, Buffalo Trail School Division

**Marilyn Welsch** – Community Member

**Marie Whelan** – Co-Principal, St. Mary School, Edmonton Catholic Schools